



Are these materials getting recycled?

Glass, pop and beer boxes, and milk cartons and juice boxes

These materials are examples of items that may be collected at the curb by the hauler in your city, but may not be getting recycled and are often needlessly wasted. Materials are only truly recycled if they are sorted at a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) and sold to a manufacturer who uses the materials to make new products.

The Story of Glass

In cities throughout Minnesota, residents set out their glass thinking that it is being recycled when often it is not. Unfortunately, much of the glass in Minnesota is not recycled but is instead used as an aggregate, a sandblasting medium, or in landfill operations as roadbed. When residents learn that materials are not being recycled into new products as they expected, they become skeptical, which understandably detracts from their willingness to take the time and energy to participate in the program and further reduces the environmental and economic benefits that recycling provides.

Why is it important to recycle glass?

There is no better material than glass to use as a measure of how successful a recycling program is at meeting the waste reduction goals and values of a community. The environmental benefits of recycling glass bottles back into glass bottles are significant in terms of saving energy in manufacturing and avoiding the mining of raw materials. Glass as a material can be recycled over and over again creating a near infinite source of energy savings and the perpetual use of natural resources. When you make a glass bottle out of raw (virgin) materials (sand, soda ash, limestone, and feldspar), it requires a great deal more energy than when you make it from recycled bottles. Conversely, when glass is wasted, so is all the embedded energy it took to make that bottle in the first place and it must be replaced with a new item made from virgin material.

How does glass get recycled?

For glass to be recycled into new bottles it must be separated by color. Clear bottles are recycled into new clear bottles, brown into brown, and green into green. If glass is not color-separated it is much harder, if not impossible, for glass manufacturers to use it.

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www.eurekarecycling.org

Our mission is to reduce waste today through innovative resource management and to reach a waste-free tomorrow by demonstrating that waste is preventable, not inevitable.

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The way in which glass—or any material—is collected and sorted impacts the quality of that material and the ability for that material to be recycled. In a two-sort system of collection, all paper types are collected in one compartment of the truck and all container types are collected in another. These materials are not compacted so there is much less breakage and embedding of glass.



In contrast, in single-stream programs glass is collected with other materials like cardboard and paper. These materials are often compacted during collection and must go through more processing machinery, resulting in higher amounts of breakage. This not only makes the glass much harder to sort out but it also significantly decreases the quality and value of the paper and cardboard because glass is embedded into those materials.

How do you separate glass by color?

Glass is usually separated by color, by hand at recycling facilities. This is difficult, if not impossible, to do when materials come to the facility in one single stream. By using a two-stream collection method, glass is more likely to be separated and therefore recycled. In addition to two-stream collection, Eureka Recycling has demonstrated that glass can be recycled by investing in optical-sort equipment. This equipment utilizes color recognition technology that separates glass by color as well as contaminants from the finished product that are incompatible with the glass manufacturing process. The result is that glass collected is color-sorted on location at Eureka Recycling's facility and can be easily recycled back into glass bottles. This also supports our local glass market (Anchor Glass in Shakopee, MN) and the local economy.

The Story of Pop and Beer Boxes and Milk Cartons and Juice Boxes

At most recycling facilities, pop and beer boxes, and milk cartons and juice boxes are mixed and baled with other papers and cardboard into “Mixed Paper Bales”. These mixed bales are then sent to paper mills where the fibers are dumped into a pulper to begin their journey to become new paper products. This is where the problem occurs.



What makes pop and beer boxes and milk cartons and juice boxes different from regular paper?

Pop and beer boxes have an additive called wet strength. This gives the paper added strength and prevents it from breaking down in wet conditions. While this is good for holding up in coolers, it has always caused problems for paper recyclers when it is mixed with other paper. To actually recycle this material and prevent it from contaminating other paper, pop and beer boxes must be kept separate from other paper.

Similar to pop and beer boxes, milk cartons and juice boxes are made with a high grade of paper. Additionally, they are layered with plastic and aluminum to allow them to contain liquid within without breaking down.

Why are these materials more difficult to recycle?

The characteristics that allow pop and beer boxes and milk cartons and juice boxes to hold up when they get wet, causes problems when they are mixed with other paper to be recycled.

One of the first steps in recycling paper is to mix paper with water in a pulper (like a very large blender). Because pop and beer boxes and milk cartons and juice boxes are made to hold up in wet conditions, the fibers don't separate in the same way as other papers in the pulping mix. Any material that has not been uniformly pulped is considered waste and is then skimmed off to be buried in a landfill or burned in an incinerator. The recyclable material in milk cartons and juice boxes and pop and beer boxes is then wasted, costing tremendous amounts of energy, fuel, time and money.

To make sure that these materials are recycled, they need to be separated from other papers and sold separately to paper mills that want this material. For example, Eureka Recycling separates out pop and beer boxes and milk cartons and juice boxes from other papers at its recycling facility and has worked with paper mills to develop a stable market for recycling these materials back into new products.

How can I make sure my materials get recycled?

Find out where your materials go once they are collected from your curb. The cities that recycle with Eureka Recycling and haulers who bring their materials to our facility are some of the few in the Twin Cities that can claim their glass pop and beer boxes, and milk cartons and juice boxes are truly recycled, ensuring that the environmental benefits of recycling are maximized and that actions taken by residents are honored. However, no matter where you live you can ask your city to include language in their contracts to ensure your glass gets recycled. Or, if you have subscription-based recycling service, you can find out where your hauler takes your material to be recycled.

Questions?

Eureka Recycling is your resource for all your questions about recycling and waste reduction. If you would like to learn more about recycling or zero waste, please contact us.

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